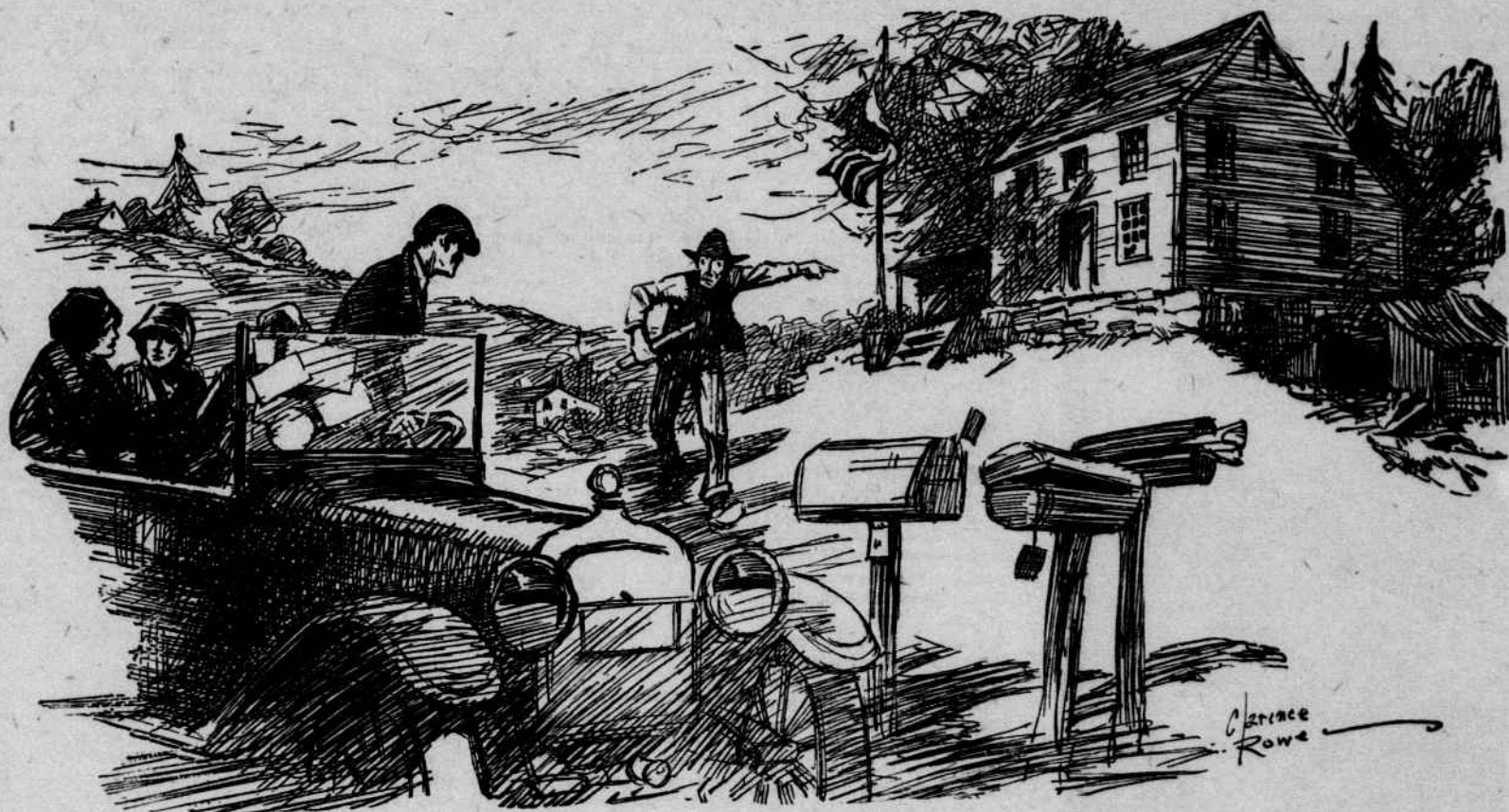


The Unwilling Philanthropists



A tall man starts out and yells at us to stop. "Haven't you got no eyes? This is the Hogboro Hospital. Can't you see it?"

"YES," assented the amateur chauffeur to a friend who was confiding with him on the tribulations of a journey recorded in various little placards which beplastered the windshield,

"these tickets illustrate auto-philanthropy. You cannot go far in a machine nowadays without being a philanthropist in spite of yourself. The good people among whom you travel insist on putting you in the philanthropist class, because they insist on shaking you down for benevolent objects. 'Let me tell you what happened on my last trip, and how I accumulated these little mottoes. I had with me my wife, my mother-in-law and my Aunt Matilda. We were surely an innocent and harmless little crowd. But on every road out of New York, and especially in adjacent States, you have to watch your step nowadays—particularly if you step on the gas . . .

"We were buzzing along in a well known county—we may call it Hickory county—when out on us pops a time-sneak from his lurking place—like a spider advancing out of a hidey hole on a poor fly.

"Wait—wait a minute!" he yells. 'I have been holding the watch on you.'

"What of it?" I asked, stopping reluctantly.

"What of it?" he echoed: 'You surely don't mean that . . . You may be pleased to hear that the Sewing Circle Institute of Hickory County is giving its annual fair, proceeds to go to the Matabeleland Home for Aged Zulus. This is a noble charity to which you should be glad to contribute. It will help to give Hickory county a place in the sun, with its county seat, Hickoryville. The newspapers of the metropolis will be bound to give Hickory county a write-up and carry the name in news dispatches. Besides, the cause is in itself a worthy one.

"The Institute appeals to all true and patriotic Americans."

"That's a kind of shorthand sketch of the first happening," continued the amateur chauffeur.

"I told the holdup I was still a true and patriotic American in spite of everything, but did not see where the Institute came in on my pocketbook or why I should be touched in behalf of aged Zulus.

"My remonstrance evoked this statement: 'Say, you heard me say we had been holding the watch on you. The fine is \$25 or twenty-five days' road mending. That used to be a chain gang stunt, but now we let you plug along leg free, only, of course, you must not abuse your liberty. You must not slack. You must do your bit.'

"Could you beat that?" demanded the amateur chauffeur. "That accounts for the little banner which reads 'I am a

Matabeleland Aged Zulu Home Supporter.'

"I put up that sign so's to dodge a thin red line of bloodsucking Hickory county claimants scattered along the route until the county ceases to have a foothold on the map.

Oriflamme No. 2 Explained.

"The next oriflamme on the windshield, friend, refers to the Saukus Village Fund for Indignant Minors, to which I have also been a contributor. It says 'I Help the Helpless.' The Fund for Indignant Minors is some kind of a kid concern, I was told. The village managers have gathered up a bunch of indignant kids and crammed them into a ramshackle old castle, and they are doing big business on them. Yes, sir, these kids to a community without much industrial foundation is priceless. At Saukus village the constable awaited us. He said he had been watching us through a spyglass and had seed us out a corner. He pointed to a benevolent deacon at his elbow who was picking his teeth in his go-to-meetings—I should have told you all this was Sunday—that's the busy day. He added: 'This is Brother Beadle; not the novel writer, but I guess a cousin of his—I am I right, Brother Bee?' 'You air,' remarked Brother B. in a voice emerging from his lowest vest button. Either that old guy was tunneled or he was a natural born ventriloquist.

"He is a magistrate," explained the constable, 'and he is holding a road court. Yours is case one, and we open it according to the ancient law of Oyer and Terminate. Yea, yea, yea, all ye that have anything to say about this here violation of the statutes will take speech in hand forthwith or forever hold your peace.' Nobody took speech in hand excepting me, and all I said was: 'How much?' On the countenances of the holdups there was general beaming, like sunshine after rain.

"I guess you are a first offender in this court, and entitled to the benefit of every reasonable doubt," says Brother Beadle, glowering at my passengers. "So this time we'll let you off for \$25. It won't cost you a cent more than that—cash."

"Don't you want the machine and call it quits?" I inquired with marked sarcasm. "Or perhaps you would like to have the machine thrown in for good measure?" I added, becoming even more sarcastic as the envenomed sting of unjust circumstances gradually poisoned my blood. But would you believe it? That official toad took it all in good honest seriousness.

"Um-hum!" says he: 'Wa'al; we might take it. Um-hum. Yes, we might—'

"At this my wife, my sister-in-law and my Aunt Matilda shrieked unanimously, but I soothed them with: 'Ladies, be calm.

You might as well know that you may soon have a chance of subscribing to the expenses of this outing, owing to the rapidly sinking condition of my funds—'

"You don't have to pay," puts in Mr. Constable, briskly. 'At leastwise, not necessarily. Don't let the funds question worry you. As I have told you, we can take the machine, and would gladly do it rather than inconvenience you. Or, if you like—and he fell into a wheedle—"If you prefer it, you can put in about twenty-five days' road mending"; good hard work. Heaven's blessed boon to man and beast. How about it? . . . 'Taint such a bad stunt, since we abolished the chain gang after it had been run down two or three times because the poor boob couldn't get out of the way of the traffic fast enough.' (Oho, thinks I to myself; so that's why there are no chain gangs any more. Truth, like the cat, will pop out of the bag! But not a word like that did I say.)

"I'll pay!" I snarled.

"Oh, very well," states the constable. 'If you prefer to do so, on a cash basis, why, it's entirely up to you. This is a free country. There ain't nobody forcin' you to pay unless you want to. The cash goes straight to the Fund for Indignant Minors. A worthy cause.'

"I dug; and after I turned over the booty the constable and Brother Beadle, the magistrate, counted it carefully, and Beadle said 'O. K.' in his basement voice, and the constable, muttering 'A worthy cause, a worthy cause,' stuck on the windshield the oriflamme of the Indignant Minors, with the phrase, 'I Help the Helpless,' which, as far as I am concerned, was one perfect lie, seeing as how the helpless helped themselves out of my pocket. Some banner, ain't it?

"But look at that one that's next it—with the ornamental printed border. It says: 'Hogboro County Fair. Build Our Peace Palace.' It happened along just like the others. We had no idea that Hogboro county was settin' up its own peace palace—Hog versus Hague, as it were.

An Appeal for a Worthy Hospital.

"We were breezing into a burg that looked harmless enough and had just skimmed by an old house—old Colonial? Oh, must have been older than that—antediluvian I should say—and it had a wilted flag trailing on a wormy pole—yes, I mean wormy; full of little holes where the worms live. This is a sort of desecration of the Stars and Stripes. Patriotism draws the line at hand-me-down flags, unless they're historic; and doesn't jibe with riddled old poles. Eh? My opinion, Yours too? Good. A tall man starts out of the

old house and yells at us to stop, and when we politely slow down he jumps toward us brandishing a club, and hollered:

"Haven't you got no eyes a tall? This is the Hogboro Hospital. Cain't you see it? You have made too much noise in passing. I am a deputy sheriff and empowered by law to exact from you a fine of \$25 for violation of the noise and speed laws ordinances. Consider yourselves tried and convicted. No, ya ain't got no more come-back than a hobbled mule. . . . But, if you prefer it, you can try a little street-making—a genteel paving stunt—for twenty-five days.'

"Well, I said, scratching my head, 'I thought I had struck the limit on this trip, but the blamed thing ain't got a limit. . . . Say, fellow, you mentioned street making—that would be by way of variety from road making, which is my old forte; and changes are lightsome.'

"Oh! Oh! Oh!" yelled my wife, my sister-in-law and my Aunt Matilda, simultaneously. 'Pay up! Pay up! We'll help you.'

"And, as with one motion, they all began to paw around their stockin's.

"Never you mind, old dears," I soothed. 'Your patriotism is wonderful; but I still have twenty-five bucks in my own sock.

Say, fellow! The way I pronounced 'fellow' would have wilted a bank robber; but the auto highwayman didn't even blench. May I be corned and pickled (de-fyin' Mr. Volstead) if the rascal didn't somehow think he was in the right and a great good man. 'Say, fellow! Who gets this money?

"Who gets it? Who should get it?" he asked. "This is for the Hogboro Peace Palace. It's a great cause. Come through or come down and get your shovel."

"But," said I, counting out the money very slowly and sadly. 'Might I ask a question? How many poor nerve-racked patients are in your hospital at present? If I have really disturbed them, let me apologize. How many are there?

"How many?" emitted this unblinking pirate. 'Nary one. Empty's a sieve. But there might be a crowd by the next time you come along—especially if you stay on the road. Here's your receipt,' and he slaps on the placard!

"That fourth ticket, with The Pole for Cammelsville printed on it, is red, white and blue, you'll notice. Quite ornamental. It cost me the concluding section of a century and rounded out my perfect day. That is the flag of the Cammelsville Fund for Arctic Exploration, which is being created out of fines for violations of the Cammelsville Anti-Automobile Law. Cammelsville's road method is strong and

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